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# THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES.

## III.—THE COLLECTION OF MR. S. A. COALE, JR., ST. LOUIS.



DESIGNED BY H. CHASE.

FIGURE FROM A PAINTING BY ALVAREZ.

UCKLE truly says: "As long as every man is engaged in collecting the materials necessary for his own subsistence, there will be neither leisure nor taste for higher pursuits." The West has become a synonyme for expanding energy. The restless, indefatigable Anglo-Saxon, subduing nature, transforming the wilderness into a garden, erecting his furnace where but a few years ago stood the wigwam of the savage, is the physical type of the growing empire of the Occident.

The pioneer, inhabiting his log cabin and surrounded by wild and obstinate forces, struggling with all his powers of brain and muscle to establish his supremacy, is in no condition to give attention to the graces of life. Even when cities are founded, and the comforts and luxuries of an advanced civilization come within his reach, he is generally too busy accumulating wealth to pay much heed to æsthetic development. However, the mental characteristics of a people remain unchanged, notwithstanding its environment. Thus, a man of æsthetic instincts, raised amid the refining influences of older communities, may in the fierce struggle to establish himself in a new country lose in a measure the mental habit and taste for intellectual refinements. But he will soon regain it

when he has acquired a position firm enough to be enabled to take a breathing spell. When at last the people of a Western city turn their attention to the fine arts, it is with an enthusiasm and lavishness of expenditure altogether surprising to the more cautious people of the East. It is true that too many of those who buy pictures, and even form creditable collections, here as elsewhere, are actuated by no higher motive than a desire for the *éclat* resulting from the possession of objects universally recognized as evidences of high culture and correct taste. But occasionally there is one with whom art is an absorbing passion,—who, though untrained in its *technique*, still, by intuition, knows how to look at nature and see harmonies of form and color which to those not possessed of the artistic sense do not exist. Such a one, who, in addition to natural art-sympathy has enriched his knowledge by extensive travel and research, is the gentleman owning the pictures which form the subject of this paper.

For many years Mr. S. A. Coale, Jr. was the most extensive, and I might almost say the only, art patron in St. Louis, and was looked upon as an eccentric sort of a person with a hobby. He was known to have paid large sums for certain pictures, the cost of which was regarded as altogether disproportionate to their real value; and the knowing ones would shake their heads ominously, and exclaim that such a waste of money on mere pictures was something to be deprecated. But it was finally discovered that good art had a standard value, like government bonds, and, besides, pictures of this class were decidedly decorative. Then the contagion spread, until now there are three well-filled private galleries in the city, besides a large number of valuable pictures in the possession of those who do not aspire to extensive collections.

On entering Mr. Coale's gallery the visitor is confronted with a large canvas by Kaemmerer. A party of ladies and gentlemen are playing croquet, and enjoying unconsciously one of those perfect days of early summer, when the sky is of the deepest blue, the foliage fresh and tender, and the very atmosphere breeds a delicious sensuousness which makes mere existence an ecstasy. In the near foreground stands in graceful pose, leaning upon her mallet, such a woman as only Kaemmerer can paint,—her willowy form clad in silk of delicate lavender tint, the texture and quality of the fabric so rendered that art is lost in reality. The other figures are finely grouped, and, with a bit of pardonable vanity, the artist has introduced his own person. The picture is full of sunlight, and so pervaded with a feeling of out-of-doors that one can fancy himself looking at a charming scene through an open window, the warm breath of summer gently stirring the foliage.

And what a landscape by Daubigny! A broad stretch of river, probably the Seine near Paris,—tree-forms in the distance,—a sky with fleecy clouds floating in the blue ether. No straining for unusual effects: it is simple, restful, wonderful. It is a lesson for painters of landscape who imagine that art consists in the portrayal of some exceptional phase in nature.

A sweet girl face looks out with witless eyes, and in diseased imagination sees the dead Polonius,—

"White his shroud as the mountain snow,"—

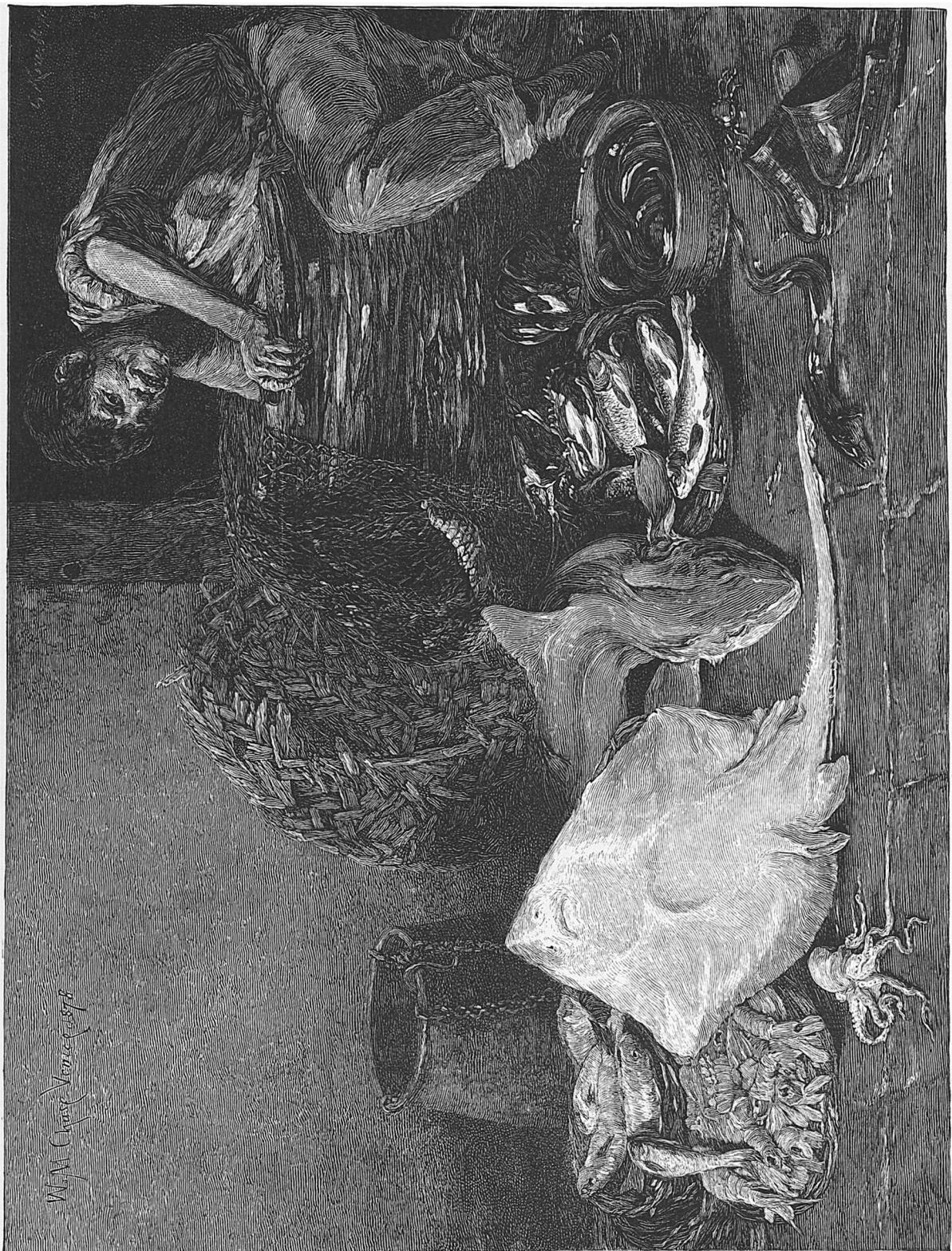
and softly sings,—

"And will he not come again?  
No, no, he is dead."

It is Ophelia with her chaplet of flowers and straw, emblems of reason lost. This mournful theme by Jacquet is like a minor chord in music, or the shadow of a cloud sweeping the sunlight away.

The next scene is laid in Venice,—not the Grand Canal, the Doge's Palace, Bridge of Sighs, and other familiar clap-trap, but a fish-market redolent with its own peculiar odor. From a large canvas a youth looks out, who might have stepped down from a picture by Franz Hals, his face aglow with pleasure at the results of a successful cruise in the Adriatic. On the slippery floor he is casting a splendid catch,—skates, eels, shrimps, lobsters, and other toothsome varieties for the piscivorous Venetians. There is a broadness, a mastery of *technique*, a knowledge, manifested in this work, which is something new in American art. One familiar with the recent wonderful change in the current of art growth in this country, and the source of its inspiration, would not hesitate to attribute this picture to W. M. Chase without looking for the signature. This artist paints in a manner bordering on defiance of conventional methods. He has the most wholesome detestation of mere prettiness in art, and, like all reformers, is intensely radical. Nearly everything from his easel is a fierce protest against the namby-pambyism into which too many of the older school of American artists have fallen. Pictures like this, unpoetical though they may be in subject, will be found in the galleries of coming centuries, when the brocaded and jewelry-bedizened beauties of the Pre-Raphaelites shall have long since passed out of memory.

We are next attracted by a grand work by Toudouze, *La Plage d'Yport*. It has the brilliant



W. M. CHASE, PINK.

A FISH MARKET IN VENICE.

The Original in the Possession of Mr. J. A. Coale, Jr., St. Louis, Mo.

G. KRUELL, SCULP.

coloring and thorough observance of the law of values characteristic of the Spanish Roman school. It is a soft and sunless afternoon, and in exquisite *abandon* are grouped on the beach a score of lovely women. The central figure might be divine Hebe, clothed in modern raiment fashioned by Worth, her deft fingers busy with some needle-work as delicate as the web woven by prudent Penelope for the hero Laertes. The white haze which overspreads the sky is slightly opaque, but the picture as a whole sparkles with genius.

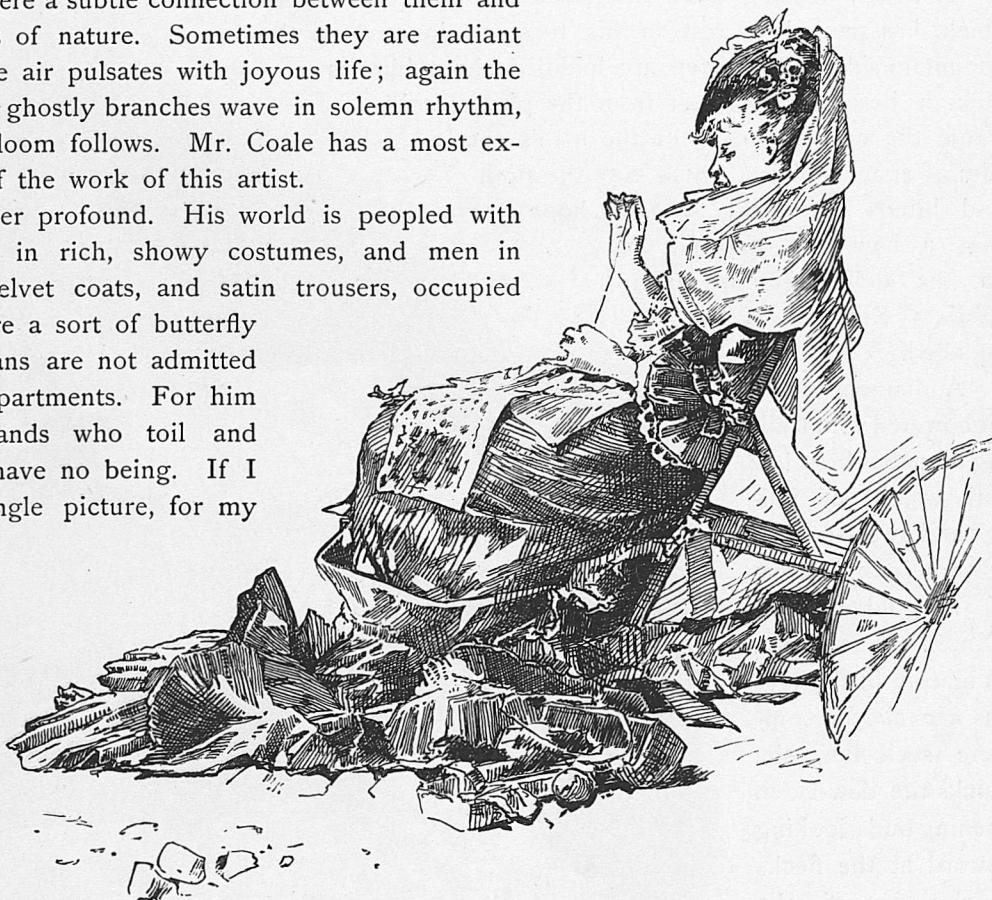
As the mysterious in nature inspires feelings of awe, so the mystic, shadowy landscapes of the great poet-painter cause one to pause reverently before a work by Corot. Some savages believe that trees, rivers, lakes, mountains, and all inanimate forms, have souls. One can almost imagine Corot to be the exponent of incorporealism. His pictures are subject to various moods, as though there were a subtle connection between them and the hidden forces of nature. Sometimes they are radiant with light, and the air pulsates with joyous life; again the clouds are leaden, ghostly branches wave in solemn rhythm, the light fades, gloom follows. Mr. Coale has a most excellent example of the work of this artist.

Alvarez is never profound. His world is peopled with high-born women in rich, showy costumes, and men in powdered wigs, velvet coats, and satin trousers, occupied as though life were a sort of butterfly existence. Plebeians are not admitted to his gorgeous apartments. For him the vulgar thousands who toil and delve and suffer have no being. If I were buying a single picture, for my own enjoyment, I should choose an artist with more of human sympathy; but in any collection of the works of contemporary painters Alvarez must have a place. The one in this gallery represents an incident in the life of Rousseau, as related in his *Confessions*. Two bewitching women are standing upon ladders gathering oranges, which they toss to him below. Everything in the picture is bright but the figure of Rousseau, which is as black in costume as a raven, perhaps to symbolize his wayward career.

From this we turn to a landscape by Inness, strong and almost savage in its gloom. In the foreground a giant oak tosses its branches in defiance at the sky, filled with black and threatening clouds. A storm is coming. The powers of earth and air are soon to measure their forces. This is an inspiration by a man who thinks.

A brown field faded and sere, stony and unfruitful, no foliage but withered leaves scarcely to be seen through the gloaming,—no light but the last gray gleam of a November day. Jervis McEntee is the poet of the picture, entitled *Melancholy Days*, which will be passed by the superficial, but treasured by the thoughtful.

A notable picture this *Sarah Bernhardt* by Clairin. Were she not possessed of the soul of



FROM THE ORIGINAL BY E. TOUDOUZE.

DRAWN BY H. CHASE.

an artist, we should have had a representation of Bernhardt, not as she is, abnormally thin, "a bag of bones," but of rounded contour, such as the *modiste* would have made her. It is the triumph of artistic truth over womanly vanity. Not a line of her angular body is softened, scarcely a curve is to be found in the folds of her closely fitting robe. The charm of French art to-day is its intrinsic realism. By this I mean its rigid adherence to nature. It may be superficial in sentiment, lacking soul and heart, but what it undertakes that it does thoroughly. Had an Englishman attempted what Clairin has done in this instance, he would have succeeded only in making a repulsive skeleton, whereas the Frenchman has given us a figure full of supple grace. Reclining upon a crimson sofa, with head resting upon her hand, she looks dreamily through and beyond you.<sup>1</sup>

A bitter, freezing blast sweeps the highlands. A poor, benumbed shepherd, with his small flock, has paused to rest in his toilsome journey up the mountain side. The sheep are huddled about him, as though beseeching shelter from the pitiless cold.

From the upturned cape of the man's coat a film of snow is blown, which cuts the flesh and blinds the sight. Let us hope that a haven is not far away.

In the delineation of such subjects Schenck is unequalled.

A diamond pool, embowered with trailing branches bent low with weight of foliage and sweet-odored flowers, is the retreat of a golden-haired nymph. Lying upon its margin in the joyous *abandon* of complete seclusion, she plucks the dew-laden opening buds, looking upward at the flecks of sky through the delicate tracery of leaves. Her form, a harmony of rounded lines and graceful curves, is softly re-



FROM THE ORIGINAL BY GEORGE CLAIRIN.

DRAWN BY H. CHASE.

flected in the mirror-like depths. It is a dream of those far-off days when the forest was peopled with fauns and dryads. Perchance if some fabled denizen of the wood were to encroach upon her privacy, the nymph would take the form of a mild-eyed doe and with speed of the wind vanish from sight. In this fair creation by Hagborg we see the nude so beautiful in form and pure in motive, that even the most prurient prude will be compelled to admire and praise.

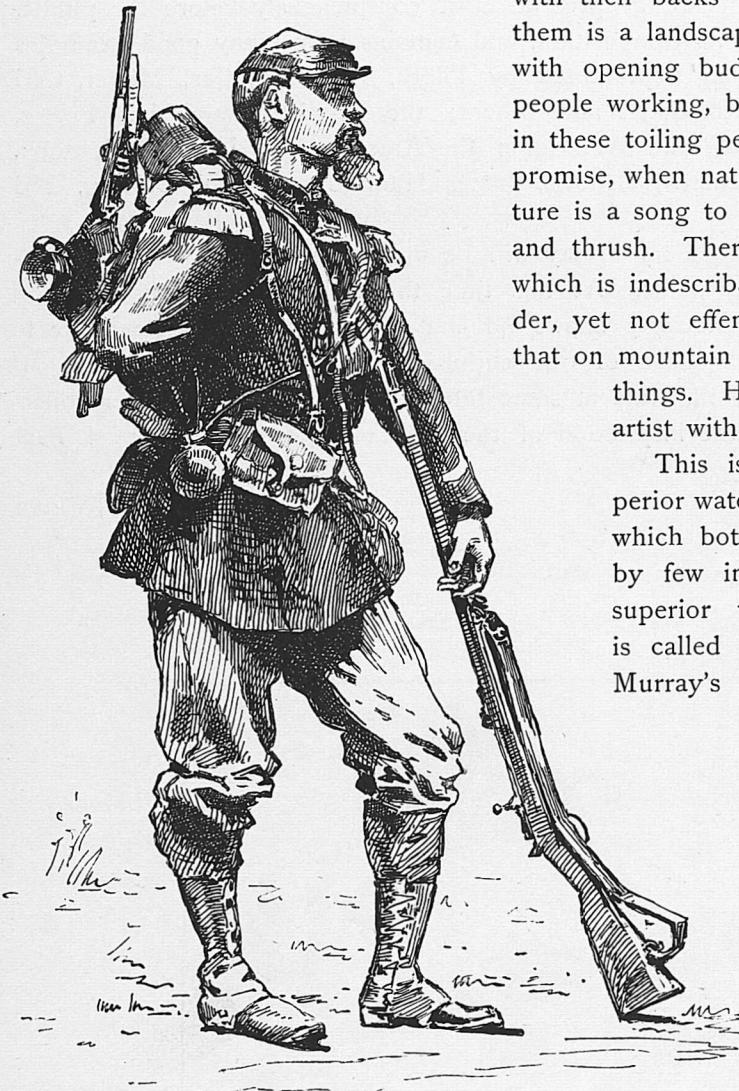
<sup>1</sup> There is an etching from this picture, by L. Monziés, published in *L'Art*, 1876, Vol. III. p. 120. The etcher has, however idealized the picture somewhat, and has made slight changes in the drawing. Mr. Chase's sketch, here given, is a closer rendering as far as it goes.

Unless one has known by actual experience the realities of the skirmish, the charge, the desperate defence, he cannot fully appreciate the terrible truthfulness of De Neuville's military pictures. He is the painter of action, of that supreme moment when men look exultantly upon death and have no thought but of victory. This infantryman, bronzed and weather-beaten, resting upon his gun, is something more than a mere soldier. He is a Frenchman, a national type, not the invincible warrior as he marched toward the Rhine, but the veteran who has learned the bitterness of defeat.

Ranged along the bank of the Seine are a number of women washing clothes. It is a commonplace sort of a subject;—simply eight or nine peasant-women in a row on their knees,

with their backs toward you. But around and beyond them is a landscape filled with mellow light, and fragrant with opening buds. Across the stream are fields with people working, but there is no suggestion of weariness in these toiling peasants. It is the season of hope and promise, when nature thrills with renewed life. The picture is a song to labor, set to the music of the robin and thrush. There is a charm about the works of Rico which is indescribable. He is simple, yet effective; tender, yet not effeminate. His atmosphere is as clear as that on mountain heights. He recognizes the relation of things. He is not a mere topographer, but an artist with a soul.

This is but one of a large collection of superior water-colors in the possession of Mr. Coale, which both in numbers and quality is surpassed by few in the country. His Vibert is a very superior work, containing eleven figures. It is called *The Theological Discussion*. Elizabeth Murray's *Spanish Betrothal* is in her best manner, and does ample justice to her reputation. Birket Foster is represented by two charming pastoral scenes, peopled with blooming English children. There are also a number of exquisite drawings; among them two by Gustave Doré,—one, *The Transfiguration*, executed especially for the Blodgett collection, and the other a commission direct from Mr. Coale, a scene from Victor Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea*; the original of the popular engraving



FROM THE ORIGINAL BY A. DE NEUVILLE.

DRAWN BY H. CHASE.

of Ittenbach's *Holy Family*, a crayon drawing of wonderful delicacy and finish; and two pencil drawings by Klimsch as fine in texture as the most elaborate steel-plate engraving. In addition to these are scores of the greatest names of the French and Spanish Roman schools.

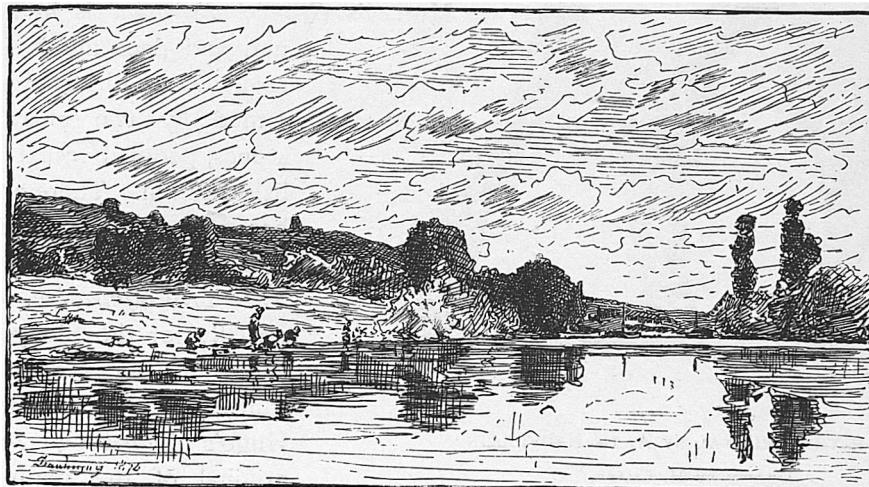
Among the latest additions to Mr. Coale's gallery I must not omit to mention a very strong and characteristic work by Gabriel Max, entitled the *Christian Martyr*. It is the head of a condemned girl, out of whose face has died all hope of human aid, but which is illumined by a radiant vision of the martyr's crown. Mr. Coale has also received a fine example by Constant. It is *Messalina*, the supreme type of the most corrupt period in the history of the race. She

is descending a broad staircase, her form the perfection of sensual grace, and in her person combining the beauty and ferocity of the leopard with such detestable qualities as only the human family is capable of developing. Of other recent purchases there is furthermore to be noted Merson's *Flight into Egypt*, with the novel motive of the Virgin asleep between the fore paws of the Sphinx. This picture symbolizes the dawn of a new era. The philosophical pantheism of Egypt is to give place to the new system to be promulgated by the wonderful child reposing in its mother's arms, in the shadow of that mysterious figure, representing the dominant idea of the age,—intellect and force.

I have described merely a few of the leading pictures in Mr. Coale's possession, and these selected mainly from the schools which are at present most conspicuously before the public. But the collection is much broader in its composition, and contains very many good examples also of other schools, the German being represented by Piloty, Kaulbach, Carl Müller, Carl Becker, Meyer von Bremen, Voltz, Ittenbach, and others; the English, by Birket Foster, T. S. Cooper, Elizabeth Murray, Playfair, and Wainright; the American, by Durand, Shattuck, Whitteredge, William Hart, W. T. Richards, Bellows, James Hamilton, Samuel Colman, and Casilear.

A description of the works in this gallery to-day will be in a year from now very incomplete, as additions are being constantly made. At this time the collection consists of nearly one hundred and fifty pictures, and Mr. Coale shows no abatement in his insatiable desire to add to the number. The wonderful influence of one enthusiastic, earnest man upon the art development of a community, I hope to illustrate at some future time by means of other collections brought together largely through the inspiration of the possessor of the pictures I have attempted to describe.

W. R. HODGES.



FROM THE ORIGINAL BY DAUBIGNY.

DRAWN BY H. CHASE.